

CASINGS 'WITNESS' TO MURDER



A bullet casing, left, showing identification codes, center and left, is seen through a microscope Tuesday at a news conference at the Los Angeles Police Academy. Assemblyman Mike Feuer has introduced a bill that would make California the first state to require gun manufacturers to include such "microstamping" for all new semiautomatic handguns.

Michael Owen Baker/Staff Photographer



Todd Lizotte, co-inventor of the gun "microstamping" technology, at podium, stands with Assemblyman Mike Feuer, right, at a news conference on Feuer's Assembly Bill 1471.

Leaders backing bullet ID

BY ANDREW GLAZER
Associated Press

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and top police brass on Tuesday endorsed a bill that would make California the first state to require gun manufacturers to install a mechanism that would stamp information on bullet casings to help investigators track down criminals.

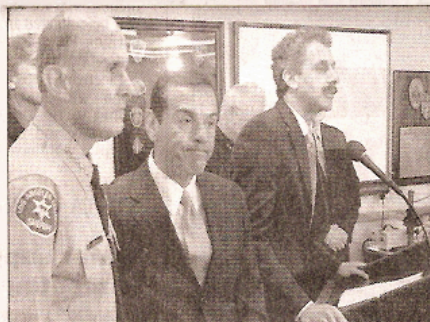
The bill, passed by the state Assembly in May and slated for a Senate vote later this month, would require all new semiautomatic handguns sold in California starting in 2010 to be equipped with the "microstamping" technology.

Such guns would microscopically etch their serial number, make and model on fired casings to allow police to link those recovered from a crime scene to the gun's owner.

Investigators often rely on the unintentional grooves and markings that a gun leaves on bullet casings to trace the source of a bullet used in a crime. But to do so, police also must recover the gun itself.

Villaraigosa praised the bill's author, Assemblyman Mike Feuer, D-Los Angeles, and called it a "no-brainer."

"Microstamping is smart, inexpensive and effective," he said before police demonstrated the technology at a Police Academy shooting range. "It will allow our police officers and detectives to trace



Assemblyman Mike Feuer, right, is joined by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, center, and L.A. County Sheriff Lee Baca to endorse gun "microstamping," a mechanism that would help investigators match casings to the guns that fired them.

a gun crime to its source and apprehend violent offenders before they take another innocent life."

A federal bill, modeled on California's, has been introduced by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Rep. Xavier Becerra, D-Los Angeles, who attended a similar demonstration in Washington in May.

The National Rifle Association opposes California's bill. In a statement on its Web site, the gun rights group said the technology was unproven and that criminals could easily grind away the

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marker from a gun. An NRA spokesman did not immediately return a message Tuesday.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca and Deputy Los Angeles Police Chief Gary Brennan said microstamping would help close hundreds of cases that otherwise would remain unsolved.

"Bullets and shell casings specifically are witnesses to crimes," Baca said. "Properly marked, they will offer evidentiary success that is necessary for a conviction in the state court system."